

Minister's Letter

Brother Samuel SSF Minister Provincial of the First Order Brothers, European Province, writes:



Dear Friends,

The fourteenth Lambeth Conference which will take place in Canterbury this summer is set to be the most challenging in its 141-year history. The bishops of the Anglican Communion will be meeting for spiritual renewal and refreshment, to gain a deeper knowledge of each other and a greater understanding of life together, and to explore and share resources for the mission of the Church in the world. Well, that's the idea, though at times over the past year, with the Communion stretched to breaking point over the issues of authority and the acceptable limits of diversity among the 44 regional and national churches, doubts have been raised over whether the Conference could or should even be held at all.

The good news is that, despite opposition and the active subversion of some Anglicans, and barring last-minute catastrophe, Lambeth 2008 will be happening; at the time of writing 70% of the bishops have indicated that they will attend and probably more than that will turn up on 16 July. The more pessimistic view is that not everyone has been invited and that Lambeth 2008 may be the swan-song of the Anglican Communion, the occasion when the vision of unity finally dies.

As Anglican followers of St Francis under commission to 'repair my house', many of us at the time of the Conference will be involved in working for peace within the Communion. Led by members of the Third Order, a group of Franciscans will be meeting at Greyfriars, the site of the original Friary established in 1224, to pray daily for the bishops meeting at the University of Kent, for reconciliation and for a way into closer unity in Christ. Meanwhile, up the hill on the university campus itself, a number of us will be part of a community of religious which will make up the Conference Chaplaincy team under Bishop Winston Halapua from New Zealand.

The majority of the team will be from the Church of the Province of Melanesia: SSF brothers from the Solomon Islands, members of the Melanesian Brotherhood, the Sisters of Melanesia and the Community of the Sisters of the Church. Their commitment to serving the Church in simplicity of life, their

joyful sharing of the Gospel and their experience of working for peace and justice in their own country will be a powerful witness to the bishops of the Communion. Others will be joining them from Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the USA and the UK. We'll be living together at the Franciscan International Study Centre, assisting with the liturgy, being available to the bishops and their spouses, and, based in the Senate House at the centre of the campus, we'll be providing a 'praying heart' for the Conference and for all that takes place throughout the three weeks.

We invite you to share with us in prayer - not for the papering over of differences, a fragile holding together of the Communion at all costs - but for wisdom, creativity and humility to prevail over fear, rigidity and pride. I believe that we and the Communion will yet be surprised by the Holy Spirit's gifts of peace and charity and by the joy which belongs to God's Kingdom.

Pax et bonum - Peace and all good

Samuel SSF